HISTORY OF NAVAL AIR STATION
PALMYRA ISLAND, TERRITORY OF HAWAII.

CHRONOLOGY

EARLY HISTORY

1798, June 13 — Earliest record of Palmyra, by Captain Edmund Fanning of the American ship Betsey.

1802, Nov. 7 — Named for the American vessel Palmyra, sailing under Captain Sawle.

1840, Sept.15 — Also named Samarang Island after the ship Samarang, sailing under Captain Scott.

1848, July 21 — Resighted by Edward Lucett and described in his Roving in the Pacific.

1859, Oct. 19 — Claimed and taken possession of by Dr. G. P. Judd of the brig Josephine, agent for the American Guano Company. He claimed it for the United States.

1862, Apr. 15 — Taken possession of by Captain Zenas Bent of the schooner Louisa, for the Hawaiian Kingdom under authority of commission issued by Kamehamela IV. He planted vegetables and left a white man and four Hawaiians on the island to establish a settlement.

1885, Sept. — Occupied for the Pacific Navigation Company for about one year by one Dillon and his wife.

1889, May 28 — Annexed to Great Britain by Commander R. N. Nichols, of the HBMS Cormorant.

1898, July 7 — Acquired by the United States and included in the Hawaiian Islands by Act of 55th United States Congress.

1912, Febr.20 — Formally taken possession of on behalf of the United States by Rear Admiral W. H. H. Southerland, in the cruiser U.S.S. West Virginia.

PRE-WAR HISTORY

1920-1930 — At various times during this period the island was visited by U. S. Naval ships. One party, from the U.S.S. Tracy, went ashore in 1925.

1938, Febr. A survey party spent six (6) weeks surveying the atoll with a view to developing a Naval air station.

1938 During this year occasional landings by seaplanes were made in the lagoon. Service of these planes was by boat, over the reef, from tenders anchored off-shore.

1940, Jan.26 The U.S.S. Quail arrived with first construction party. The party was under the command of Lieutenant Martin Kehart, CEC, USNR.

1940, Febr.2 The Pacific Air Base Contractors were established on Meng Island.

1940, Febr.22 Channel blasting was begun, and on March 16th a channel eight (8) feet deep and twenty (20) feet wide was completed into the West lagoon, allowing the passage of small boats.

1940, Apr.24 Work started on landplane runway No. 6, adjacent to Cooper Island.

1940, August The Pacific Air Base Contractors commenced the construction of the Naval Air Station, Palmyra Island, Territory of Hawaii. The contractors' camp was established on Meng Island and the Naval Air Station facilities were planned for Cooper Island. Spoil from dredging operations was used to fill a landing field along Cooper Island, headed 068 degrees true. Additional spoil was used to build up on the south and southwest sides of Meng Island.

1940, Oct. 11 The U.S. Engineer Corp dredge Sacramento arrived to commence channel and lagoon dredging.

1940, Oct. 24 The work of excavating to a twelve (12) foot depth of Central Island in the West lagoon was commenced. This was completed January 27, 1941.

1941, Jan. 30 The center and West lagoon were connected by the dredging of a cut twelve (12) feet deep and seven hundred fifty (750) feet wide through the barrier finger reef between the lagoons, allowing the establishment of an East-West seaplane runway of ten thousand (10,000) feet in length.

1941, Febr.22 Dredging of a channel twenty (20) feet deep and two hundred (200) feet wide from the West lagoon to sea was begun by Dredge Sacramento. The channel was completed May 31, 1941.

DEFENSE PHASE BEGINS

1941, Mar. 12 — A party of two officers, First Lieutenant T. G. Roe and First Lieutenant C. A. Barninger, and forty-five (45) enlisted Marines arrived and commenced establishing the defenses of Palmyra.

1941, May 24 — Work was begun on C.A.A. Radio Range and facilities.

1941, June 26 — Construction work was begun on Naval Air Station facilities on Cooper Island. Work included a cold storage plant, mess hall and galley, two (2) 200-men barracks, power house, and warehouse.

NAVAL AIR STATION ESTABLISHMENT ANNOUNCED

1941, August — The Commandant of the Fourteenth Naval District announced the establishment of the U. S. Naval Air Station, Palmyra Island, T. H.

1941, Aug. 17 — Lieutenant David J. Welsh, U.S. Navy, arrived with twenty-one (21) men and assumed command of the Naval Air Station, Palmyra Island.

1941, Sept. 2 — Construction was begun on splinter-proof coral-backfilled hospital on Cooper Island.

1941, Nov. 1 — Work on radio station commenced.

1941, Nov. 11 — Construction of one (1) 200-men barracks on Cooper Island completed.

WAR HISTORY

1941, Dec. 7 — During the 08-12 watch, official information was received to the effect that Japan, following an air raid on Oahu, had declared war on the United States and Great Britain. General Quarters were sounded and condition watches set.

1941, Dec. 23 — At 1840, an enemy submarine opened fire on the station, concentrating it's fire on the U.S. Engineer Corps Dredge Sacramento, which was anchored in the central lagoon. The Sacramento was hit, causing minor damage to a boat davit and slight injury to the Master, Captain Vivian, from flying splinters. The enemy's fire was returned by our 5" Battery No. 3 and the enemy submerged, after firing six salvos.

1941, Dec. 18 Cooper mess hall and galley completed.

1941, Dec. 25 Two (2) PBY planes (VP-23), with Ensign Joseph M. Kellam, U. S. Navy, in charge, reported for patrol duty at this station.

1941, Dec. 28 Captain Gordon Rowe, U. S. Navy, reported aboard and assumed command of the station.

1941, Dec. 30 Commissioned general mess. Total rations first day - three hundred twenty-four (324).

1942, Jan. 1 Completed landplane runway No. 6; five thousand (5,000) feet long and five hundred (500) feet wide, bearing 068 degrees true. One radio station in operation.

1942, Jan. 5 Second 200-men barracks completed.

1942, Jan. 7 Sounded General Quarters on two occasions between 2100 and 2330. Unidentified ship first heard at a distance of eight (8) miles, bearing ten (10) degrees true. The ship maneuvered to a bearing of three hundred twenty (320) degrees true distance 4.3 miles and then faded out.

1942, January All essential buildings being sandbagged and continued preparations for defense were carried out.

1942, Apr. 18 First air group, VMF-211 under Major Luther S. Moore, USMC, arrived. The group had fourteen (14) F2A's, Brewster "Buffalos", and were manned by personnel of the U. S. Marine Corps.

1942, Apr. 21 At 0900, the U.S.S. O'Brien, under command of Captain Robert G. Tobin, U.S. Navy, Division Commander of the destroyers U.S.S. O'Brien, U.S.S. Mustin, U.S.S. Flusser and U.S.S. Mugford, stood outside the channel and delivered to the station via motor launches the personnel and effects of the ground crew for the air group. The ground crew consisted of one (1) officer and one hundred fifty-five (155) enlisted men.

Earl E. Comingove, CQM (PA), USNR, reported with station Tug YT-159.

1942, July 1 Meng Island dock warehouse completed.

1942, July 24 A detachment of personnel from the 5th Construction Battalion arrived for temporary duty.

1942, July 25 The F2A Brewster "Buffalos" were replaced by fifteen (15) F4F-4's.

1942, Aug. 5 Balance of officer and enlisted personnel of the 5th Construction Battalion arrived.

Motor boats Nos. 22 and 24 reported for duty under this command.

At this time the military personnel aboard the station consisted of one hundred one (101) officers and fifteen hundred sixty-three (1,563) enlisted men. In addition to the military there were two (2) contractor's employees, fifty-three (53) dredge employees, and four (4) C.A.A. employees.

The military personnel was divided as follows:

	Officers	Enlisted Men
Naval Air Station	25	316
Marine Air Group	20	153
Marine Defense Battalion	47	933
Navy Medical (with Marine Defense Battalion)	4	37
5th Construction Battalion	2	108
Totals -	101	1,563

1942, Aug. 7 Captain Gordon Rowe, U. S. Navy, was relieved as the Commanding Officer of Naval Air Station, Palmyra Island, T. H., by Captain James R. Dudley, U. S. Navy.

1942, Sept. Construction started on Naval Officers' B.O.Q.

1942, Oct. 24 Eighteen (18) P39's of the Army 12th Pursuit Squadron arrived from Christmas Island for temporary basing at the station.

1942, Nov. 2 Army 12th Pursuit Squadron was loaded on the U.S.S. Kittyhawk, which departed on it's assigned mission.

1942, Nov. 3 Two (2) distilling units for the station arrived.

1942, Nov. 17 The U. S. Engineer Corps Dredge Sacramento, having completed it's duty at this station, departed.

1942, Nov. 17 During this period the training of personnel in defense functions continued. Construction and installation of facilities proceeded, particularly the radio range, B.O.Q., third warehouse, aviation gasoline storage, and operations tower.

1942, Dec. 1 C.A.A. radio range and facilities in operation.

1943, Jan. 1 During the month, work continued on the B.O.Q., Aviation utility building, extension of water mains, additional fuel and Diesel oil storage, and on mooring Dolphins at Paradise Island. Improved radio equipment and airport control equipment were installed. Splinter-proof, coral backfilled hospital, aviation warehouse, operations tower and seaplane ramp were completed. Land plane runway No. 11 was also completed at this time.

1943, Febr.16 Captain Robert N. Hunter, U. S. Navy, relieved Captain James R. Dudley, U. S. Navy, as commanding officer.

1943, Febr.16 Collision occurred in air between SNJ-4 and F4F-4, both of VMF-211. F4F-4 made safe landing on runway. SNJ-4 crashed at sea, pilot parachuted and was picked up at sea uninjured. Radioman-Gunner George A. Burlingame, PFC, USMCR, missing at sea.

1943, Mar. 1 Construction completed on Holai warehouse.

1943, Mar. 24 Captain Herbert T. Merril, USMC, missing as result of crash of F4F-4 belonging to VMF-211. Crash occurred at Eastern end of the island, into the sea.

1943, March Twelve (12) SBD-4 "Dauntless" aircraft arrived for the defense of the island and were put in operation by the Marine air group.

1943, Apr. 7 F4F-4 crashed at sea. Second Lieutenant John Blake Carrel, USMC, lost at sea.

1943, Apr. 10 Construction started on reinforced concrete hospital on Engineer Island.

1943, Apr. 15 Construction started on N.A.T.S. hotel.

1943, Apr. 20 5th Construction Battalion relieved by the 76th Construction Battalion.

1943, Apr. 30 Meng-Cooper Island telephone system switch board completed and put in operation.

1943, May 1 Construction completed on causeway from Holei to Bird Island.

1943, May 10 Construction completed on aviation utility building.

1943, May 14 B.O.Q. completed and Navy officers' mess moved to the new quarters.

1943, May 15 Sand Island emergency runway completed.

1943, May 27 — U.S.S. Copahee arrived and embarked F4F-4 planes and a part of the personnel of VMF-211. The Marine flight personnel remaining on the station were redesignated as Scout Bomber Section, Headquarters Squadron, 4th Marine Air Base Defense Wing. The SBD-4 planes were retained by this group.

1943, May 26 — Four (4) batteries of four (4) 90MM guns each completed and tested. Eight (8) 40MM gun emplacements completed.

1943, June 9 — Fire in West wing of B.O.Q. Two rooms completely destroyed by flames and entire West wing damaged by fire and water. Public Works officer estimated five (5) days necessary for renovation.

1943, June 11 — Station SBD engaged in routine interception of incoming flight, crashed at sea bearing twenty-two (22) degrees, distance 25 miles. Pilot First Lieutenant George C. McLain, USMCR, and Gunner Corporal Wallace G. Wilson comprised the crew. Station rescue underway immediately, arriving at the scene fifty (50) minutes later. Various debris recovered but crew lost.

1943, June 15 — Construction started on radio receiving building.

1943, June 30 — Construction completed on Naval Air Station high explosive magazines.

1943, July 1 — Construction started on N.A.T.S. warehouse.

1943, July 8 — JRF airplane for station delivered by U.S.S. Long Island.

1943, July 15 — Eight (8) 40MM guns tested for first time by practice firing.

Five hundred fifty thousand (550,000) gallon aviation gasoline storage available.

1943, Aug. 21 — Additional dredging operations were started to widen seaplane runway.

1943, August — At this time the military personnel on the island was one hundred twenty-five (125) officers and twenty-two hundred eighty-five (2,285) enlisted men. In addition to the military, there were seven (7) C.A.A. and nine (9) P.A.A. civilians on the island.

1943, August The military personnel was divided as follows:

	Officers	Enlisted Men
Naval Air Station	37	409
76th Construction Battalion	10	511
1st Marine Defense Battalion	57	1,211
Marine Air Base Defense Wing	21	154
Totals -	125	2,285

At this time the armament consisted of the following:

5"/51 cal. seacoast defenses, consisting of three (3) batteries of two (2) guns each. Able battery located on Janey Islet, Baker battery located on Home Islet, and Charley battery located on Eastern Islet.

90MM A.A. anti-aircraft defense, consisting of three (3) batteries of four (4) guns each; three (3) 90MM A.A. directors.

3" A.A. guns, M-3, consisting of two (2) batteries of four (4) guns each; two (2) three inch directors for each battery.

Height finders, consisting of four units.

3"/50 Navy guns, one being installed on each of the following islands: Janey, Home, Eastern, and Bird.

60" search lights - four units installed.

40MM A.A. guns, M-2 - twenty (20) guns with directors.

20MM A.A. guns, MK-4 - twelve (12) guns on hand.

.50 cal. A.A. machine guns - twenty-four (24) on hand; four (4) in temporary positions and twenty (20) in permanent positions.

.30 cal. A.A. machine guns (water-cooled) - thirty-eight (38) on hand.

.30 cal. A.A. machine guns (air-cooled) - six (6) on hand.

37MM M1916 - five (5) on hand.

60MM Infantry mortars - four (4) on hand.

81MM mortars - five (5) on hand.

Tanks - Seven (7) M-3's and three (3) M-212's.

1943, Aug. 11 Fire in Marine mess hall on Aviation Island; damage sufficient to require the rebuilding of entire galley section.

1943, Sept. 1 Cooper Island drainage system completed.

1943, Sept.10 Construction started on Cooper-Engineer Island causeway road.

1943, Sept.17 Scout Bombing Section, Head uarters Company, Marine Air Group, relieved by VMSB Detachment-1.

1943, Oct. 10 Construction completed on N.A.T.S. hotel.

1943, Oct. 15 First Defense Battalion, Fleet Marine Force, was relieved by Army task force under command of Lieutenant Colonel Allingham.

1943, Oct. 31 Construction completed on Paradise Island aviation gasoline tank farm.

1943, Nov. 1 Construction completed on reinforced hospital on Engineer Island.

1943, Nov. 13 Cooper-Engineer Island causeway road completed.

1943, Nov. 15 Construction completed on four hundred (400) foot loading dock bulkhead. Construction started on Cooper Island No. 3 and No. 4 Gasoline Tank Farms.

1943, Nov. 23 Construction completed on two (2) reinforced concrete reservoirs with a capacity of one hundred thousand (100,000) gallons of fresh water each.

1943, Dec. 3 Captain Robert N. Hunter; U. S. Navy, relieved as commanding officer by Commander Bert H. Creighton, A-V(G), USNR.

1943, Dec. 12 Construction completed on SBD hanger and on fuel and Diesel oil system.

1943, Dec. 29 Construction completed on small-boat house and piers.

1944, Jan. 5 SBD-4, station plane, crashed at sea due to engine failure. Personnel rescued by USAT RP-47 leaving the area of Palmyra.

1944, Jan. 10 76th Construction Battalion relieved by Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit #527.

1944, Jan. 19 Construction completed on Cooper Island gasoline tank farms.

1944, Sept. 28 Commander Walter Melvin Hanson, A-V(G), USNR, relieved Commander Bert H. Creighton, A-V(G), USNR, as Commanding Officer.

1944, Oct. 1 An Army B24, number 86112, crashed at the end of the runway after being unable to take off. The plane was severely damaged. There was no injury to personnel.

1944, Oct. 1 All personnel were removed from outlying islands to Cooper Island, with the exception of hospital personnel which remained on Engineer Island. All watches on outlying islands were terminated and communications between gun positions was secured.

1944, Oct. 1 All officers quartered in the Junior B.O.Q. moved to the B.O.Q., and work was commenced on the remodeling of the Junior B.O.Q. into a hospital.

1944, Oct. 23 Approval of station consolidation and partial roll-up given by CINCPOA (Serial 003435, dated October 21, 1944.)

1944, October CBMU engaged in demolishing and salvaging sheds and buildings, preparing material and equipment for shipment from station. Cable was being laid for seadrome lights.

1944, Nov. 1 Planes on board station consisted of seven (7) SBD-4's, one (1) PBY-5A, one (1) J2F-5, and One (1) NH-1 Howard.

1944, Nov. 21 Remodeling of Junior B.O.Q. into hospital was completed. The hospital was moved from Engineer Island, thus consolidating all station activities.

1944, Nov. 30 Meng Island power house decommissioned. The building will be converted into a warehouse.

1944, Dec. 1 Removal of underground aviation gasoline tanks on Paradise Island commenced and completed during the month.

Laying of cable for seadrome lighting completed.

1944, Dec. 7 Eight (8) SBD-6 planes arrived for use by the Scout Bombing Squadron. The SBD-4 planes were salvaged.

1944, Dec. 7 JACSPAC system of air communications inaugurated at Navy radio station. Four (4) AACS radio operators and one officer, Captain Alexander Lewin, arrived. This group was officially designated as Detachment Fifty of the 145th AACS Squadron.

1944, Dec. 7 With the cancellation of P.A.A.'s contract for operations south of Hawaii, the N.A.T.S. unit at Palmyra became entirely Navy. The last P.A.A.-operated plane came through Palmyra on December 1st,

and by this date all Pan-American personnel had departed from Palmyra.

1944, Dec. 7 With the inauguration of JACSPAC, the CAA radio station on Palmyra was placed on a standby basis. Five (5) civilian employees were removed, leaving two (2) men to maintain equipment.

1945, Jan. 1 At this time the military personnel on the island consisted of forty-three (43) officers and five hundred eighty (580) enlisted men. In addition, there were two (2) C.A.A. employees and fifteen (15) Ellice Island natives.

The military personnel was divided as follows:

	Officers	Enlisted Men
Naval Air Station	28	314
CBMU #527	4	190
VS-47	8	50
N.A.T.S.	2	13
A.A.C.S. (Army)	1	4
Signal Corps (Army)		9
Total -	43	580

1945, Jan. 10 All five inch guns were dismantled and moved to the dock for shipment.

Work was started on enlarging and improving the drainage of the air strip.

1945, January During this month all structures on Sand Island were demolished. Work proceeded on the removal of shacks and huts on all islands, and with the removal of all underground structures.

1945, Febr. 1 A JRF-5 plane for station use arrived.

1945, Febr. 4 YJ1 Racon Homing installed.

1945, Febr.15 The four (4) sixty-inch search lights were removed from their locations along with directors and power units. All were crated for shipment.

1945, Febr.23 Air-sea rescue group of three (3) officers and four (4) enlisted men reported aboard with PBY-5 to relieve one (1) officer and five (5) enlisted men.

1945, February During this month the demolition work on all islands continued.

1945, March During this month the improved drainage system for the air strip was completed. Work on the demolition of excess structures on all islands proceeded.

1945, Apr. 15 Under authority of orders issued by COMNATSPAC, the N.A.T.S. unit at Palmyra was decommissioned on this date, due to the withdrawal of N.A.T.S. from the South Pacific area. All personnel were withdrawn. The Ellice Island natives who were under contract to N.A.T.S. were returned to their homes.

1945, May During this month the demolition work on shacks, huts, underground structures, and excess buildings was completed.

1945, June During this month the station was engaged in only routine work. Due to the climate and the type of construction of a majority of the buildings, maintenance work is very heavy. All interiors of buildings were repaired and painted.

1945, July 1 At this time the military personnel on the island consisted of thirty-five (35) officers and three hundred ninety-three (393) enlisted men. There were two (2) C.A.A. civilians.

The military personnel was divided as follows:

	Officers	Enlisted Men
Naval Air Station	20	231
CBMU #527	3	114
VS-47	11	44
A.A.C.S. (Army)	1	4
Total -	35	393

The defenses of the island consisted of the following:

Four (4) 3 inch 50 dual-purpose guns.
Four (4) 40MM A.A. mobile mount guns.
Six (6) .50 cal. A.A. machine guns.
Three (3) .30 cal. machine guns.
Three hundred seventy-five (375) 1903 Springfield rifles.
Twenty-one (21) Thompson sub-machine guns.

Aircraft on the station consisted of the following:

Eight (8) SBD-6 planes, one (1) PBY-5 plane, one (1) JRF-5 plane, and one (1) NH-1 Howard.

1945, July 11 Commander Walter E. Premo, Jr., (A3), USNR, relieved Commander Walter M. Hansen, USNR, as Commanding Officer.

PART II

NARRATIVE
INTRODUCTION

The mission of the Naval Air Station, Palmyra Island, Territory of Hawaii, is now and has throughout the years of the war, been as follows:

1. A) Aviation facilities;
   A Naval Air Station to provide basic facilities and accomodations for thirty-six (36) single-engine aircraft and twelve (12) patrol planes, and for the servicing of itinerant aircraft.

   B) Naval facilities;
   To provide facilities for minor fleet refueling point.

2. Furnish medical care for station personnel and transients.

The function and importance of Palmyra, however, has changed considerably during the course of the war. During the first year and a half of hostilities the position of Palmyra as an outpost and airbase in defense of the Hawaiian position, and as a staging point on the line of communications to the south and southwest Pacific was of extreme importance. As the strength of the Navy was built up, and with the start of the Gilbert Islands operations, the importance of Palmyra as a defense position was somewhat decreased; however, it remained of great importance as a staging point for itinerant aircraft until the securing of the Marianas in 1944, at which time operations in the Southwest Pacific area were curtailed and the war moved on to the West.

The history of Palmyra, it's growth in personnel from one hundred twelve (112) men on December 7, 1941, to the maximum of two thousand four hundred ten (2,410) men in August of 1943, and it's subsequent decline in personnel to four hundred twenty-eight (428) men in July of 1945, traces it's importance in the early years of the war and the decline of it's importance as operations progressed.

The story of this growth in personnel and facilities and their subsequent reduction is the war history of the Naval Air Station, Palmyra Island.

EARLY HISTORY

Palmyra Island is the second most northerly of the line islands. It lies near the equator, 960 nautical miles south of the Hawaiian Islands

and 786 nautical miles southeast of Johnston Island. It is a true atoll, and originally consisted of approximately 52 islets lying on a barrier reef enclosing three separate lagoons.

Palmyra was named after the American vessel "Palmyra", sailing under Captain Sawle who sighted the island on November 7, 1802. The island had previously been sighted and recorded by Captain Edmund Fanning of the ship "Betsy", on June 13, 1798.

The island was later named Samarang Island by a Captain Scott, after his ship "Samarang". Captain Scott sighted the island on September 15, 1840.

In the following years, Palmyra, or Samarang as it was sometimes called, had many claimants. In October of the year 1859, it was claimed, and taken possession of, by a Dr. G. P. Judd, of the brig "Josephine". Dr. Judd was acting as agent for the American Guano Company. No guano was ever dug by the company and apparently the claiming of the island for the United States was never recognized in Washington. In April, 1862, the island was claimed and taken possession of by Captain Zenas Brent, of the schooner "Louisa", for the Hawaiian Kingdom. Captain Brent acted under authority of a commission issued by Kamehamela IV. Captain Brent planted vegetables and left one white man and four Hawaiians on the island to establish a settlement. This was the first known occupation of the island. It is not known how long these parties remained on the island but no permanent settlement was established. In the subsequent years Captain Brent's claim to the island passed through many hands, including the Pacific Navigation Company on whose behalf the island was occupied by one Dillon and his wife for about one year in 1885.

Judge Henry E. Cooper of Honolulu acquired various claims of title to the island and in the year 1912, after some considerable litigation, he was granted title to the island. In 1913, Judge Cooper, Dr. Joseph Rock, and others spent sixteen days on the island. At that time floral and soil studies were made.

In 1920-1921 the island was occupied for the period of about a year by a Mr. and Mrs. Meng and Edward Brenner. They came to the island to investigate copra possibilities for an organization called the Palmyra Development Company.

The island was acquired by the United States as a part of the Hawaiian Islands when they were annexed by Act of the 55th Congress in July, 1898.

Subsequent to this time claims to the island were still being made by British interests by virtue of a visit to the island in May, 1889, of Commander R. N. Nichols, of HMBS Cormorant, who at that time claimed the island for Great Britain.

Formal possession of the island was taken for the United States on February 20th and 21st, 1912, by Rear Admiral W. H. H. Southerland, in command of the cruiser West Virginia.

PREWAR HISTORY

During the period from 1920 to 1938, the island was at various times visited by parties from United States Navy ships. In 1925 one such party went ashore from the U.S.S. Tracy.

In 1938 a survey party was sent to the island and spent six weeks in the surveying of the atoll, with a view to developing of a Naval air station. In the same, and the subsequent, year occasional landings by sea planes were made in the lagoon. Service of these planes was by small boat over the reef from tenders anchored off shore.

The station was originally intended as a seaplane base. On January 26, 1940, the U.S.S. Quail arrived with a construction party under Lieutenant Martin Kehart, CEC, U.S. Navy. A base camp was established on Meng Island and the first channel blasting was begun. By March 16, 1940, a channel eight feet deep and twenty feet wide was completed into the west lagoon, allowing the passage of small boats.

In August of 1940, the Pacific Air Base Contractors arrived at Palmyra, established a camp on Meng Island and commenced the construction of the Naval Air Station, Palmyra Island.

In October, the U. S. Engineer Corps' dredge "Sacramento" arrived and began the work of dredging a seaplane runway and a ship channel. Central Island, located in the west lagoon, was excavated to a depth of twelve feet. The west and center lagoons were connected by dredging a cut twelve feet deep and seven hundred fifty feet wide through the barrier finger reef separating the two lagoons and a seaplane runway ten thousand feet in length was thus established.

The spoil from these dredging operations was used to fill in along the lagoon side of Meng, Idella, and Cooper islands. The fill along Cooper Island was used for the construction of a land plane runway.

The dredging of a ship channel twenty feet deep and two hundred feet wide from the west lagoon to sea was commenced in February of 1941, and completed in May of that year.

During the summer and fall of 1941 construction work proceeded. Construction of cold storage plant, mess hall and galley, two 200-men barrack s, a power house, warehouse, and landplane runway was in progress. Work was also begun on C.A.A. radio range and radio station.

On March 12, 1941, the first defense group, consisting of two officers, First Lieutenant T. G. Roe and First Lieutenant C. A. Barninger, and forty-five enlisted Marines, arrived and commenced the establishing of the defenses of Palmyra.

On August 17, 1941, Lieutenant David J. Welsh, U.S. Navy, and eleven enlisted men arrived. Lieutenant Welsh assumed command of the station. At this time the establishment of the U. S. Naval Air Station, Palmyra Island, Territory of Hawaii, was announced by the Commandant of the Fourteenth Naval District.

WAR HISTORY

On the day of the declaration of war, December 7, 1942, the Naval Air Station, Palmyra Island, was still in the process of construction by the Pacific Air Base Contractors. No planes were based on the station. The personnel on the station was almost entirely civilian, the military consisting of approximately sixty-five Navy men and forty-seven Marines.

On December 23, 1941, Palmyra experienced it's first and only enemy attack of the war. At about 1840 local time, on that day an enemy submarine surfaced and opened fire on the station. The fire was concentrated on the U. S. Engineer Corps' dredge "Sacramento", which was anchored in the central lagoon. The Sacramento was hit, causing slight damage. The Master of the dredge, Captain Vivian, sustained a slight injury from flying splinters. The fire of the submarine was returned by the island's five inch battery and the enemy submerged, after firing six salvos.

On December 25, 1941, operations from the station began with the arrival of two PBY's, under Ensign Joseph M. Kellam, U. S. Navy, for patrol duty at the station.

On December 28, 1941, Captain Gordon Rowe, U. S. Navy, arrived and assumed command of the station. Lieutenant Welsh became Executive Officer.

Land plane operations from the station became possible on January 1, 1942, with the completion of a landplane runway of five hundred feet in width and five thousand feet in length.

During the first three months of 1942 the personnel of the station was increased as rapidly as possible and the contractor's civilian employees were withdrawn until about the first of April, when all civilians, except those operating the Engineer Corps' dredge, were withdrawn. At this time the air station personnel consisted of sixteen officers and two hundred forty-seven enlisted men. The first Marine defense battalion consisted of thirty-seven officers and seven hundred forty-five enlisted men.

During the period following the withdrawal of the civilian employees, construction work on other than purely defense installations slowed considerably, as it was carried on by the station personnel in time which could be spared from the work on the island's defenses. During this time splinter-proof shelters were constructed, buildings were sandbagged, and gun implacements and other defense positions were established by the defense battalion.

The defense of the island was greatly enhanced on April 18, 1942, with the arrival of the first air group to be based on the station. This group, VMF-211, was composed of Marine pilots under the command of Major Luther S. Moore, USMC. They were equipped with fourteen Brewster "Buffalos". The ground crew consisted of one officer and one hundred fifty-five enlisted men. On July 25th the Brewster "Buffalos" were replaced by fifteen new F4F-4's.

In July of 1942 the personnel aboard the station consisted of one hundred one officers and one thousand five hundred sixty-three enlisted men. In addition to the military, there were two contractor's employees, four C.A.A. employees and fifty-three civilian employees on the dredge "Sacramento". The military personnel consisted of the following:

	Officers	Enlisted Men
Naval Air Station	25	316
Air Station Medical	3	16
Marine Air Group	20	153
Medical Attached to Marines	4	37
Fifty Construction Battalion (Arrived July 24th)	2	108
Marine Defense Battalion	47	933

On August 7, 1942, Captain James R. Dudley, U. S. Navy, reported aboard the station as relief for Captain Gordon Rowe, U. S. Navy, Commanding Officer.

The latter part of August, A PBM operated by Pan American Airways arrived and left a P.A.A. mechanic. Pan American, at this time, had a contract with the Navy for the operation of Naval Air Transport planes south from Honolulu. Regular scheduled operations began about September 25, 1942. The planes, under the Naval Air Transport service, were operated in part by P.A.A. employees and in part by Navy personnel. This was the start of the N.A.T.S. organization on Palmyra, and it grew rapidly until at the peak in the Spring of 1944 there were over forty Navy and P.A.A. men on Palmyra. At that time N.A.T.S. schedules had reached a peak of four scheduled trips each way daily.

Construction work continued throughout the year 1942. This work was on all the islands and consisted of all types of construction. The permanent construction, with the exception of a large warehouse on Holai Island and the C.A.A. radio range on Home Island, was all confined to Cooper and Menge Islands. The construction included a dock warehouse, B.O.Q. for Naval officers, operations tower, aviation warehouse, and a radio station. On all islands numerous Quonset huts and small frame temporary structures

were erected for the housing of the defense forces, air group, and construction battalion.

By the end of 1943 the strength of the defense battalion had been increased until it totaled approximately fifty-nine officers and twelve hundred fifty enlisted men.

On February 16, 1943, Captain Robert N. Hunter, U. S. Navy, reported aboard and relieved Captain James R. Dudley, U. S. Navy, as Commanding Officer.

In March of 1943, twelve SBD-4 "Dauntless" Dive Bombers arrived and were put in service by the Marine air group.

During 1943 construction work continued. The radio station was completed. An aviation utility building, B.O.Q., recreation hall, N.A.T.S. hotel, N.A.T.S. warehouse, SBD hangar, small boat house and pier, Naval Air Station magazines, Marine magazines, and the reinforced concrete hospital on Engineer Island were all completed. The water facilities were extended and enlarged. Fuel oil and Diesel oil storage were completed. Landplane Runway No. 11 and the emergency runway on Sand Island were both completed.

On April 23, 1943, the Fifth Construction Battalion was relieved by the Seventy-Sixth Construction Battalion.

On May 27, 1943, a part of the personnel of VMF-211 was detached. The use of F4F-4's was also discontinued at this time and the Marine flight personnel remaining on the station was designated as Scout Bomber Section, Headquarters Squadron, Fourth Marine Air Base Defense Wing.

During the summer of 1943 the Naval Air Station, Palmyra Island, reached the height of it's development. In June of this year the military personnel on the station numbered one hundred twenty-five officers and two thousand two hundred twenty-eight enlisted men. In addition to the military personnel, there were seven C.A.A. and nine Pan American civilian employees on the island.

The military personnel was divided into the following groups:

	Officers	Enlisted Men
N.A.S. Personnel	37	409
76th Construction Battalion	10	511
1st Marine Defense Battalion	57	1,211
Air Base Defense Wing	21	154

At this time the armament consisted of the following:

5"/51 cal. seacoast defenses consisting of three batteries of two guns each.
90MM A.A. defense consisting of three batteries of four guns each. Each battery with directors.

3" A.A. guns, M-3, consisting of two batteries of four guns each; two 3-inch directors for each battery.
Four height finders.
3"/50 Navy guns - four guns.
60" searchlights - four units.
40MM A.A. guns, M-2 - twenty guns with directors.
20MM A.A. guns, MK-4, twelve guns.
.50 cal. A.A. machine guns - twenty-four on hand, four being in temporary positions and twenty in permanent positions.
.30 cal. A.A. machine guns (water-cooled) - thirty-eight on hand.
.30 cal. A.A. machine guns (air-cooled) - six on hand.
37MM M1916 - five on hand.
60MM Infantry mortars - four on hand.
81MM mortars - five on hand.
Tanks - seven M-3's and three M-212's.

On September 17, 1943, the Scout Bombing Section Headquarters Company Marine Air Group was relieved by V.M.S.B. Detachment One.

From October 7th to 15th an Army task force under Lieutenant Colonel Allingham arrived to take up the defense of the island as relief for the First Marine Defense Battalion.

On December 4, 1943, Commander Bert H. Creighton, A-V(G), USNR, relieved Captain Robert S. Hunter, U. S. Navy, as Commanding Officer.

With the end of 1943, the construction phase at the Naval Air S tation, Palmyra Island, ended. The 76th Construction Battalion was relieved by the Construction Maintenance Unit No. 527.

In the forepart of 1944, with the securing of the Marshall Islands, the importance of Palmyra as an outpost and defense point for the Hawaiian position was greatly reduced. As there was little possibility of an attack other than a Commando-type raid, the defense garrison of the island was reduced in February by the removal of four hundred sixty-seven men, being about one-half of the Army task force assigned to the defense of the island.

At this time, however, with operations proceeding in the West and Southwest Pacific, the importance of Palmyra as a staging base for planes bound for the Southwest and West Pacific continued. During the first half of this year the traffic of transient planes being flown to forward areas reached it's maximum peak, where it remained until the securing of the Marianas at which time traffic at Palmyra began to decrease.

In March of 1944, an eight hundred foot long and three hundred foot wide extension was added to Runway No. 6, making a total length of six thousand one hundred sixty feet.

On March 28, 1944, Navy VS-47 Scouting Squadron of eight officers and fifty-five enlisted men replaced the Fourth Marine Air Base Detachment One.

On May 12, 1944, the remaining personnel of the Army task force, consisting of fifteen officers and three hundred twenty-eight enlisted men were removed from the island. In order to man the observation posts and guns on the far side of the island a part of the Ordnance Department personnel was moved to Kaula and Bird islands.

On July 1, 1944, the military personnel on the island consisted of fifty-two officers and seven hundred twenty-three men. In addition, there were eight C.A.A. employees, fifteen P.A.A. employees, and fifteen Ellice Island natives.

The Ellice Island natives were brought to the island upon the completion of the N.A.T.S. hotel in 1943, to act as servants in the hotel. At this time all N.A.T.S. flights remained overnight at Palmyra. The natives were on the island until the discontinuance of N.A.T.S. service through Palmyra in April, 1945, at which time they were returned to their homes.

On July 11, 1944, at about 1930 local time, the SBD Patrol contacted a possible submarine, bearing 010 degrees twenty-eight miles from the island. The station was alerted. At 2114 a flare was observed at a bearing of 030 degrees. At 2154 red flares were sighted between 360 and 030 degrees and at 2158 flashing red and white lights were reported at 360 degrees. The station was alerted for a possible Commando-type raid. White flares were observed again at 0112, 0115 and 0126, all bearing about 20 degrees. The searchlight on Menge tower was lighted for five minutes but there was no signal of identification from possible friendly surface craft. Nothing further was observed after this time.

During the last half of this year work was commenced on the removal of temporary shacks and Quonset huts on the outlying islands. These shacks and huts had been used for the housing of the Marine Defense Battalion and the Army Task Force.

In September of 1944, a survey board met at Palmyra, by direction of CINCPOA, and recommendations were made concerning the physical consolidation of station activities. As a result of this survey and the subsequent approval of the report and recommendations, the salvage of excess station material and structures began in October and continued through the first part of 1945.

On September 6, 1944, air-sea rescue was unofficially initiated at the station when Lieutenant P. H. Manning, USNR, reported aboard with a PBY-5A for duty involving flying.

On September 28, 1944, Commander Walter M. Hanson, A-V(G), USNR, relieved Commander Bert H. Creighton, A-V(G), USNR, as Commanding Officer.

In October, due to the reduction in personnel, the B.O.Q. and the Junior B.O.Q. were consolidated and work on the remodeling of the vacated Junior B.O.Q. into a hospital was commenced. The remodeling was completed the last of November and the hospital was moved from Engineer Island to the new quarters.

The Ordnance personnel stationed on Bird and Kaula islands had been removed in October and the watches and communications between gun positions had been secured. With the removal of the hospital from Engineer Island, all personnel were now quartered on Cooper and Meng Islands.

On December 7, 1944, eight SBD-6 aircraft arrived as replacements for the SBD-4 aircraft in use by the scouting squadron. The SBD-4 planes were surveyed.

On December 1, 1944, with the institution of the joint operation of the Navy radio station under JACSPAC, the C.A.A. radio facilities were placed on an inactive status with the exception of the radio range and homing beacon. Two C.A.A. employees were retained on Palmyra to maintain equipment. The other C.A.A. employees were transferred.

On December 7, 1944, four A.A.C.S. radio operators and one officer, Captain Alexander Lewin, arrived to aid in the operation of the joint communications center. This group was officially designated as Detachment Fifty of the 145th A.A.C.S. Squadron.

During this same period with the cancellation of the P.A.A. contract for the operation of N.A.T.S. planes south of Honolulu, the last P.A.A.-operated N.A.T.S. flight came through Palmyra. At this time all P.A.A. employees left Palmyra and N.A.T.S. at Palmyra became entirely a Navy organization.

At the end of 1944, the military personnel consisted of forty-three officers and five hundred eighty enlisted men. In addition, there were two C.A.A. employees and fifteen Ellice Island natives.

During the last half of 1944, all five inch guns had been decommissioned. Two had been removed from their mounts. During January the remaining guns were removed and shortly thereafter were shipped from the island.

In February, the four 60" searchlights, together with director s, were removed, crated, and shipped from the island.

During the first quarter of this year the work of tearing down underground structures, shacks and Quonset huts continued until it's completion in May.

On February 3, 1945, an air-sea rescue group of three officers and four enlisted men reported aboard with a PBY-5 aircraft. This group relieved Lieutenant P. H. Manning, USNR, and five enlisted men.

On April 15th, the N.A.T.S. unit at Palmyra was decommissioned and all N.A.T.S. personnel were detached from the station.

Upon completion of the demolition work the major portion of the work done on the station now consisted of routine maintenance and improvement of facilities and equipment. Due to climatic conditions, building maintenance is extremely heavy and at the present time the buildings and equipment require considerable maintenance at all times to keep them in their present excellent condition. All buildings have been newly painted and all blackout paint removed from windows.

The military personnel on the station as of July 1, 1945, consisted of thirty-five officers and three hundred ninety-three enlisted men. There were two civilian C.A.A. employees.

The military personnel consisted of the following:

	Officers	Enlisted Men
Naval Air Station	20	231
CBMU No. 527	3	114
VS-45 Squadron	11	44
A.A.C.S. (Army)	1	4
Total -	35	393

The armament of the station consisted of the following:

4 - 3"/50 dual-purpose guns.
4 - 40MM mobile mount A.A. guns.
6 - .50 caliber machine guns.
3 - .30 caliber machine guns.
21 - Thompson sub-machine guns.

The following aircraft were based on the station:

8 - SBD-6 aircraft; 1 - PBY-5; 1 - JRF-5; 1 - NH-1.

On July 11, 1945, Commander Walter E. Premo, Jr., (A3), USNR, relieved Commander Walter M. Hanson, (A3), USNR, as Commanding Officer.